

# Continuity and Change: Dwelling in the In-Between

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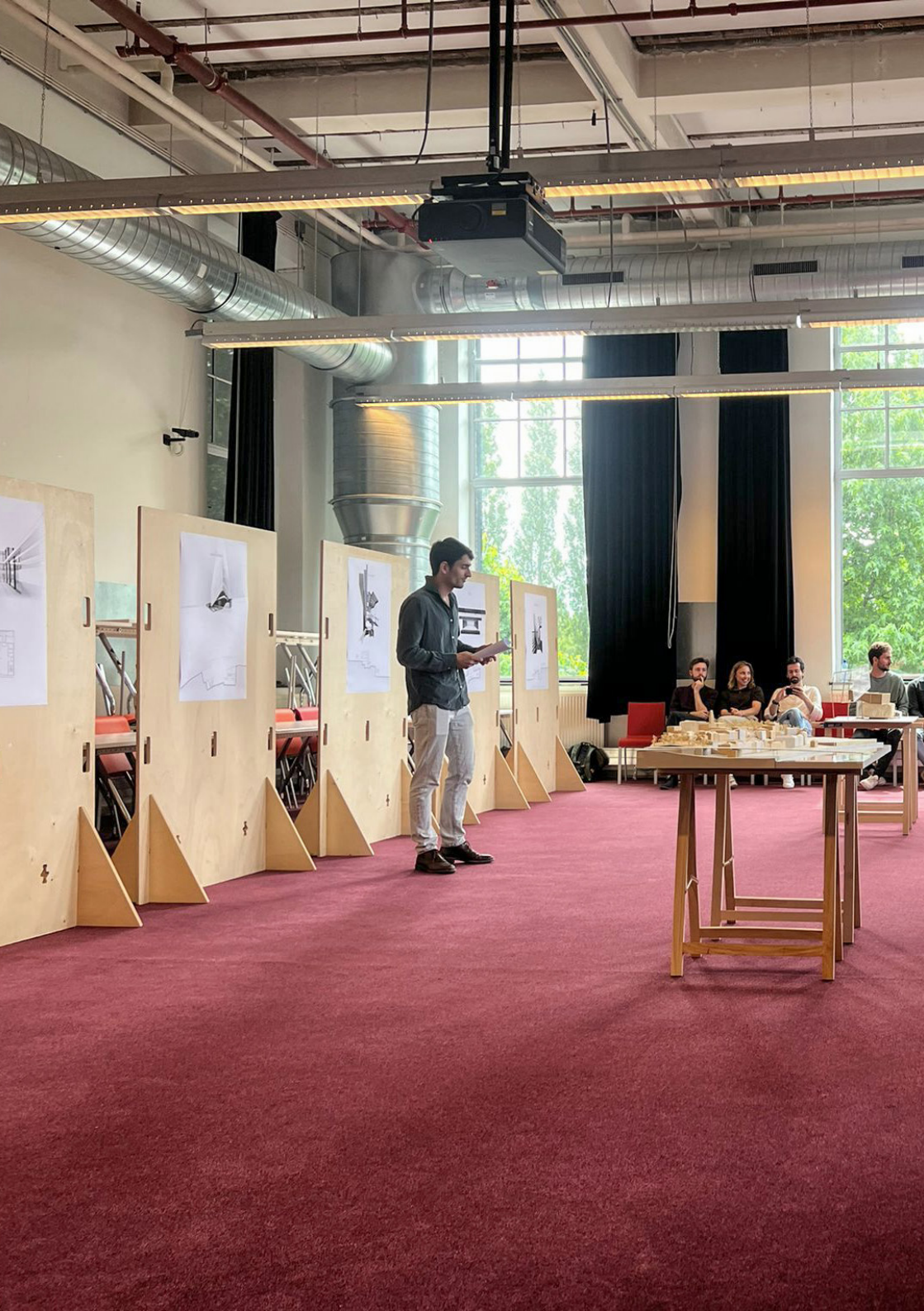
Graduation Studio, Masters in Architecture

Chair of Methods of Analysis and Imagination

Faculty of Architecture of the TU Delft

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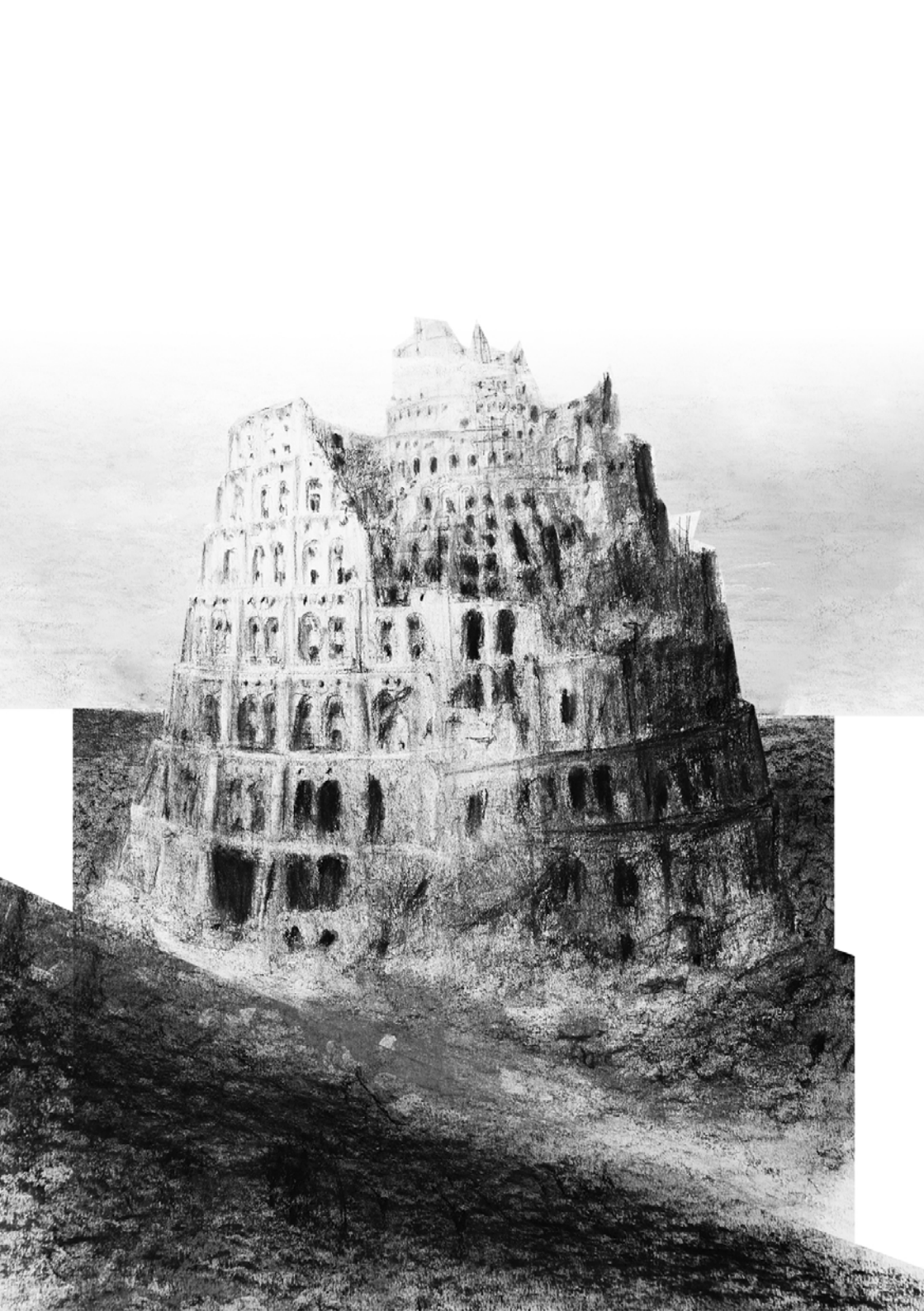
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## Preface

Thank you for coming. I am very excited to be sharing with you a highly curated selection of my work from this past year. Today's presentation will be exhibition style. This means I will be using the material up on panels and trussells as the driver of today's conversation. I welcome you to come up close to the materials. We will be moving across the room in a clockwise direction, so be mindful of the space around you.



# 1 Tower of Babel

On the panel you see my interpretation of Dutch painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1563 painting *The Tower of Babel*. It depicts the parable narrated in the Old Testament, from which I will now read a fragment:

'They said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth," And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of man had built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing they propose to do will be impossible for them. Come let us go down and confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So, the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off from building the city.' (Gen. 1:4-9)

**The Tower of Babel depicts the collective self-assertive ambition to reach the heavens. In doing so it reveals through architecture two inherent and inevitable conditions of human life: firstly, that our highest aspirations are unreachable and unsustainable, both because no height of building will reach heaven and because the foundations are already in ruins even when construction is still happening atop. And secondly, that our highest aspirations set aside the realities of the human body. The tower, unable to provide basic need shelter, has been**

populated by hanging precarious shelters for the laborers of the construction .

My project directly delves into these two realizations and engages in them as two sides of the same coin. The first indicates the aspirations of the human mind which makes us long for the transcendental. On the flip side is the gravity-bound and mundane reality of our human flesh. My project serves as a manifesto of sorts, depicting my beliefs about architecture and life at large, by putting side by side the two realities of human life, doing so not through metaphor or lofty expression but through concrete constructable realities.

The following thirteen panels are a choreography through the project, revealing the duality of transcendence and mundane at different scales and operations: first at on the context of the city, its historic past, and ambition for the future which results in my proposal for a masterplan for the historic neighborhood of Kosancicev; then at the scale of the landscape, referred to the inclined plaza, with its distinct geography and existent conditions; and finally with the progressive dematerialization of the three-part interior of the building.







## 2 Belgrade

The city of Belgrade has its own tower of Babel of sorts at the Kalamegdan Fortress: strategically located at the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers, the promontory provided through history a highly contested point of defense. It now is the most cherished of monuments of Belgrade.

The surrounding city, however, has historically suffered from neglect. It was repeatedly destroyed by the recurring invasions of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Moreover, the first masterplan of Belgrade, drawn up in 1867 by Emilijan Josimovic largely redrew the city center to favor modern change, in doing so demolishing most of the existing structures. Incidentally, these attitudes have perdured, in New Belgrade in the 1960s and even in the Waterfront Project today.

How can the city be able to adapt and chance for a future while keeping the traces of its past? How can it avoid both modernist tabula rasa attitudes and the mumification of the ruin? How can it engage in a process of transformation and layering akin to that of the fortified walls of Split?

Interestingly, some of early answers to these questions are hinted at in the current urban condition. Taking a closer look at the map, shows a remarkable feature: the trace of the outer line of defense of the fortress has perdured to this day. Particularly along the area of Kosancicev Venac, where the elevation change is most significant, the wall is still visible in the form of a limestone precipice.



### 3 Site Model

The area of Kosancicev is characterized by providing the main postcard for the city of Belgrade. However, at a closer inspection it is clear that the area has been largely overlooked and faces stark urban neglect. My intervention takes the continuity of the outer wall in the area of Kosancicev to engage in a process of urban transformation that pairs modern urban change to that of continuity of existing conditions.

The proposed master plan densifies the block along its perimeter, creating private backyards in the middle. This has been largely influenced by the IBA competition in Berlin as described by Ezra Ackan in *Open Architecture*. Similarly, the treatment of public space and the process of street making has borrowed the principles advocated by Jane Jacob's in *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*. The resultant block is one that is able to bring in modern change to the neighborhood while preserving its continuity with the past.

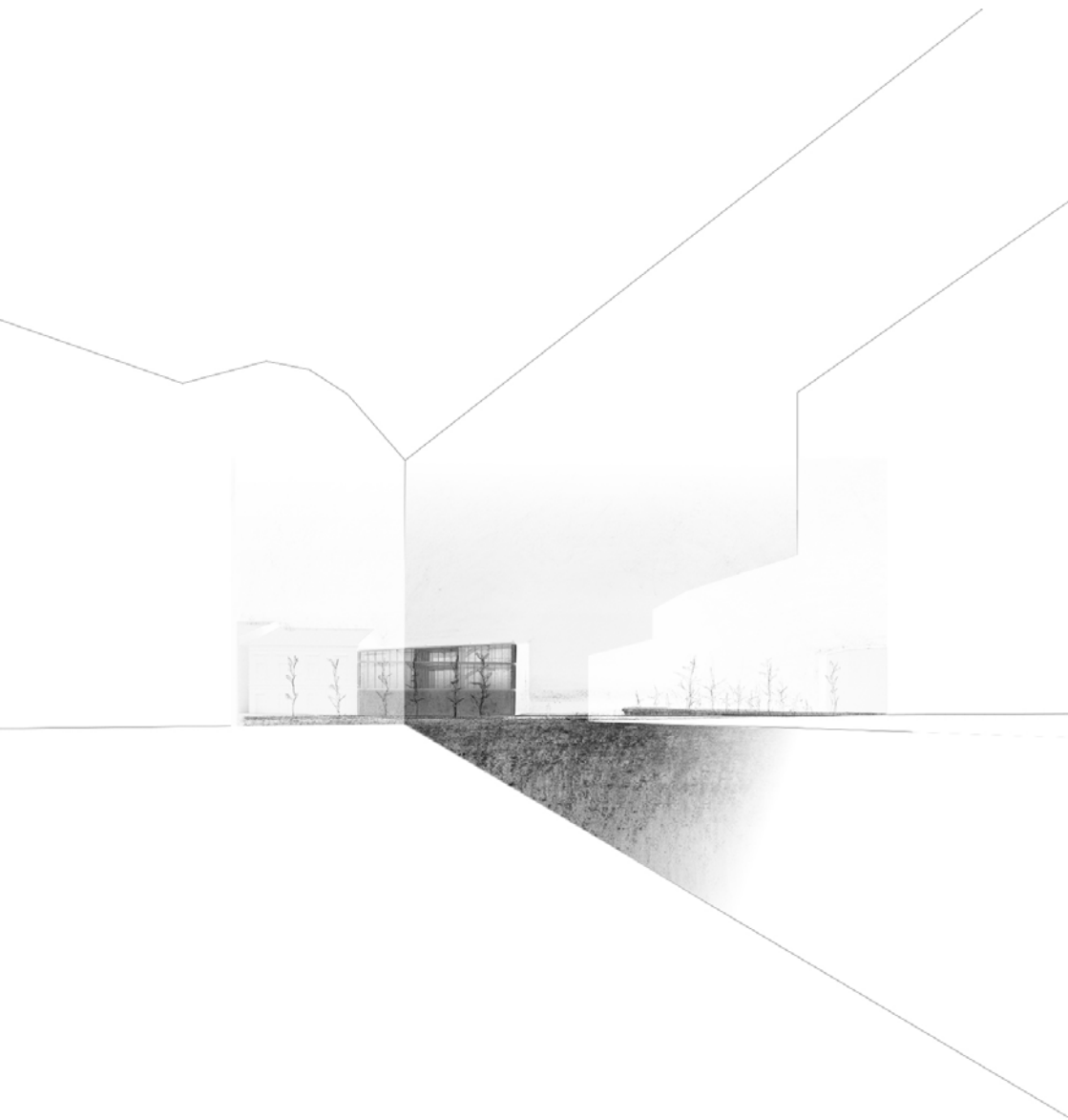
Moreover, the masterplan focuses on the creation of pedestrian pathways across the block. The steep elevation change between the water and the city is bridged with three connectors. The middle one is largely new and is characterized by its oblique orientation in relation to the hill side. This is the result of the alignment of the axis of Kaja Petra Street with that of Beton Hala, while keeping the historically significant building in Karadordeva Street. The vertical connectors are intersected by a long park pathway that runs North to South on top of the historic outer wall.



The intersection of the vertical movement axis and the longitudinal one occurs at the inclined plaza, the focus of the intervention. On the surface it is a public space. Below it, the inclined plaza houses a series of public spaces that act as a community center for local residents. These have been largely disenfranchised by the process of change already occurring in the area. Additionally, the program engages with other local actors like the university of applied arts, whose premises would be significantly affected by the proposal of the masterplan. The resultant program consists of a communal vegetable garden at the lower level, a multipurpose room and theater in between, and a series of meeting and reading rooms in the sail.

However, ultimately my role as the designed is to build through the tools of construction. That is because buildings are specific even if our lives in them are not. I believe that buildings do not tell people what to do, or how to behave. Buildings do not dictate behavior; they allow for it. Precisely, a precision in form is one that allows for a multitude of these possibilities. The project learns from the fortified wall of split and the sensibility of Aldo Rossi in *The Architecture of the City* to propose a sequence of spaces that allow for life to occur in them through means of construction, not assigned programs.

The following sequence of perspectives are a choreography of movement that pair light and space to movement. All these interventions are done to juxtapose the transcendental to the mundane in modes that are architectural by nature: that is through the means of construction. The project operates under the conviction that the discussion of the transcendental and the mundane occurs through specific architectural procedures and operations in useful pairs: heavy and light, stereotomic and tectonic, earth and sky.



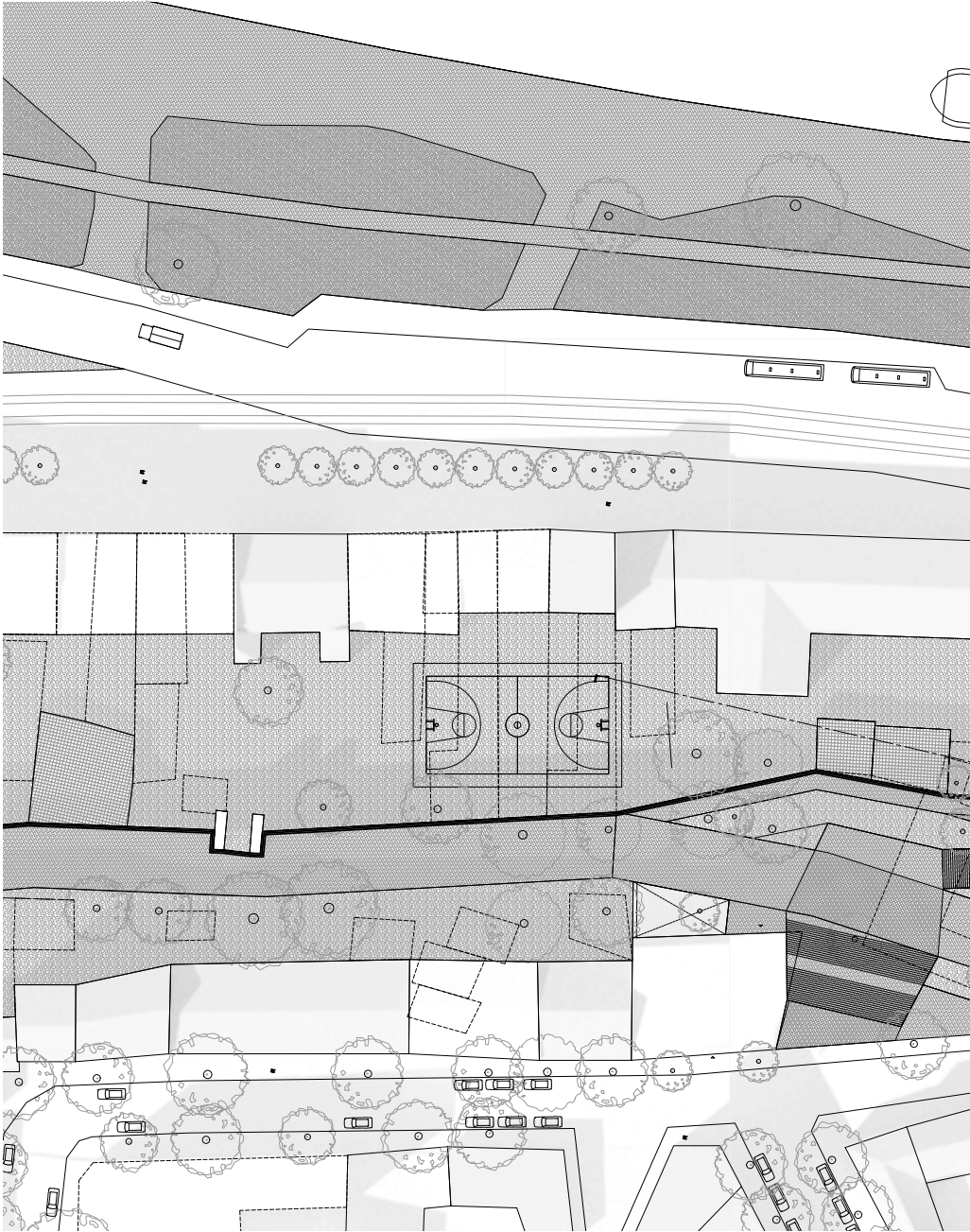


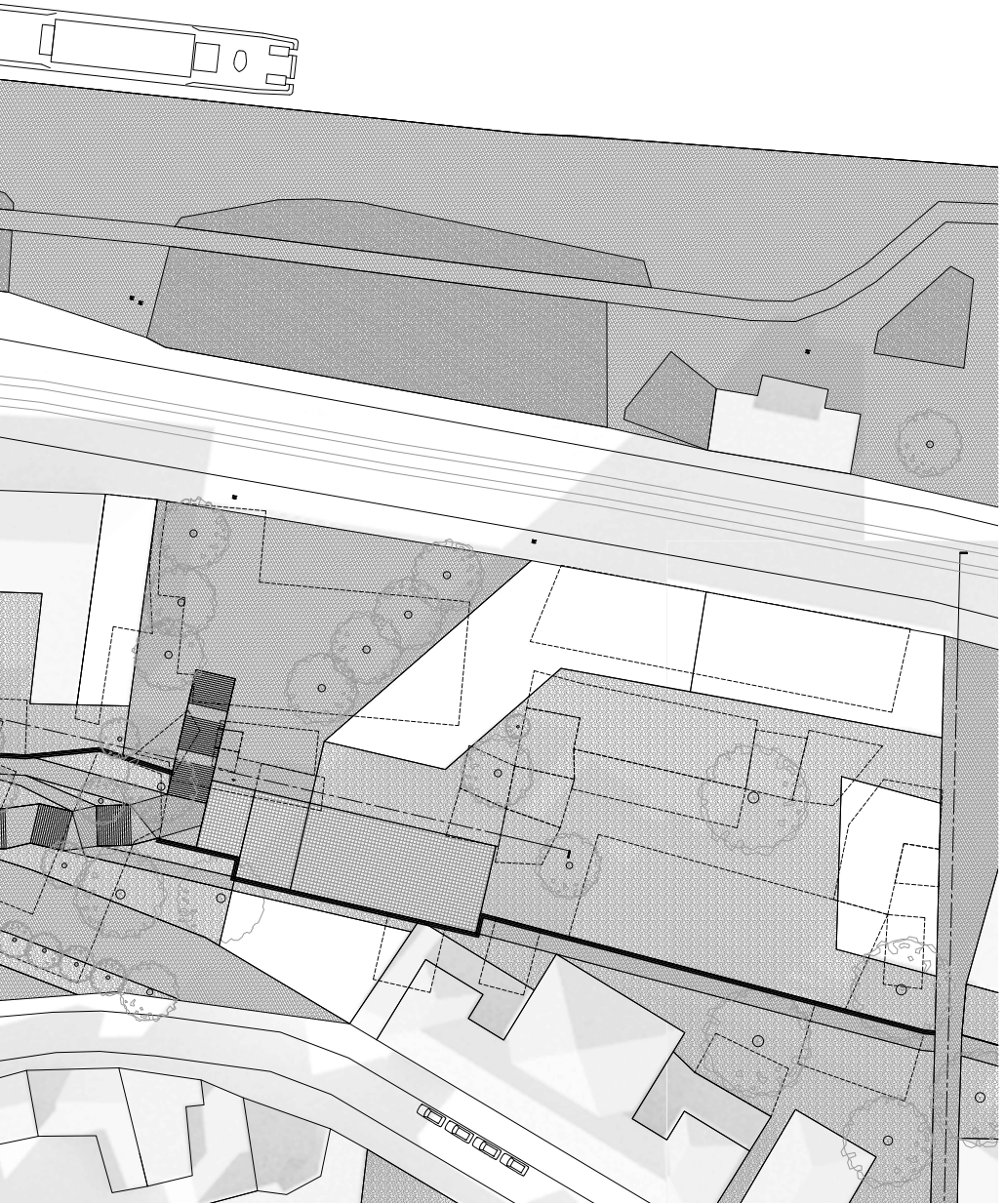
## 4 Above

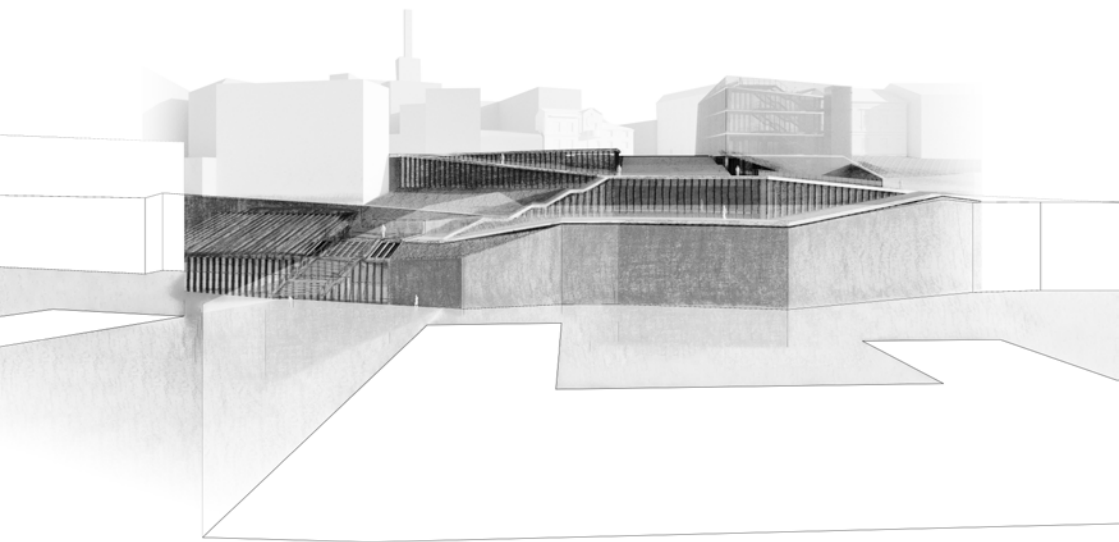
We are approaching the site from the city, coming down the long commercial street of Kaja Petra Street. The intervention first reveals itself by the Sail at the end of the axis of the street. The Sail follows the perimeter block logic dictated by the master plan, and is appropriately dimensioned next to its neighbor.

However, through its wrapping in a fabric, use of glass and light weight construction, the building dematerializes. Its transparency and reflection blend the structure with the view which lies ahead. Precisely, the very shape of the sail in the diagonal is pointing towards such view, and indicating the suggested direction of movement. Once cleared the corner, the emptiness of the adjacent plot opens the view to the river, and New Belgrade beyond.

As seen in the site plan, from the top of Kaja Petra Street you gently stroll down: a first flight of steps double up as seating for an amphitheater. Then, the next sequence of stairs takes you parallel and down to the remnants of the outer wall. Finally, the lowest stretch descends into a lower plaza, which is facing Karadordeva Street and the Sava River.







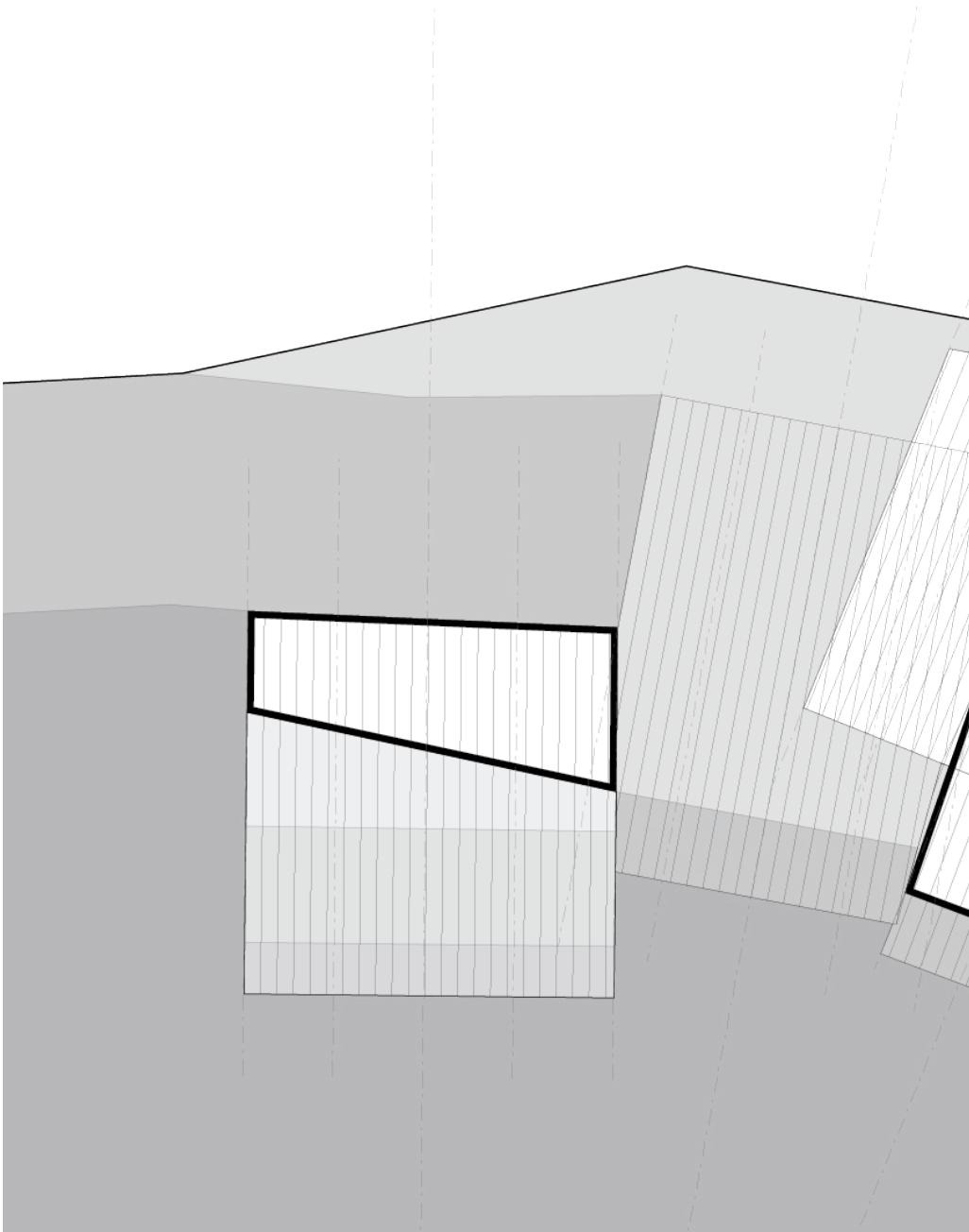


## 5 Below

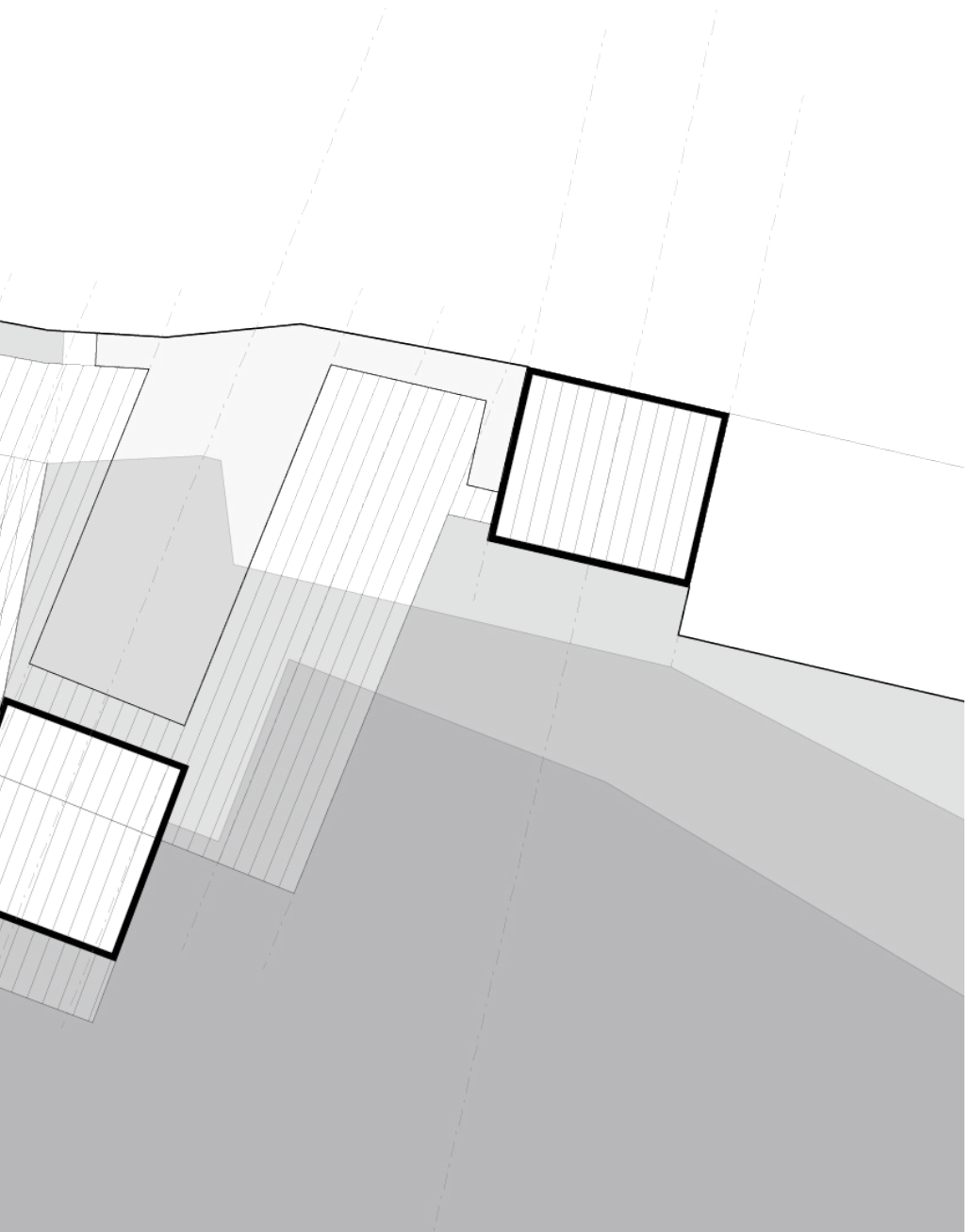
Having descended across the inclined plaza, the site looks very different from below: the light sail at the top of the site is brought into contrast with the heavy existing outer wall at the bottom. The inclined plaza is between the two. It is expressed through a series of simple details that highlight the horizontal slabs of the pedestrian paths in contrast with the vertical slats of the retaining walls. Incidentally, this form of detailing allows for spaces to be enclosed behind such walls: the amphitheater above is replicated below in an indoor mixed-use auditorium.

Moreover, the project unearths the outer wall to leave it raw and exposed to the eyes of the public, since nowhere else in the block is the wall at reach from the street. In doing so, the intervention highlighted the wall as an existing structure. This is further evidenced by retaining the inclined shed and underground lagumi, both of which the project intervenes in.

The choreographed movement described that is occurring at the surface of the inclined plaza is paired to a parallel sequence that is occurring underground. As seen by the schematic site plan, the project bridges the elevation change of the site through a several built floors in the underground. These spaces respond to the existing conditions while providing for new transformable uses of the site.









## 6 Concept Model

The concept model shows negative space of the three main interior parts of the project, referred to as rooms, which are connected to each other and the outside through the connectors, referred to as thresholds.

The first of the rooms is the existing lagumi, which rests on the underground and anchors the project. Its construction is through carving. The second space is the auditorium, which is dug into the ground. Finally, there is the sail which blows above the surface.

The way each room has its own distinct construction methods is a means for the building to respond to the site and increase the dematerialization of the building as it gains height above ground. Similarly, each of these parts is rotating in relation to each other, creating a sequence that dances through the terrain. Finally, each of the rooms has a distinct treatment of the view.

However disparate each room might be, the intent is for all three of them to be characterized by their resting nature, which is the partially the result of the careful use symmetry and proportions.

The differently built but similarly resting nature of the rooms is juxtaposed to the similarly built but transitory nature of the thresholds. These relate the rooms to each other and to the exterior, and are indicated in the model with the metal mesh. The first threshold is the lower entrance and intervenes on the existing inclined shed. The second one is



a vertical circulation shaft, and the third is a suspended catwalk. These transition spaces reflect the dislocation of space, the point of irresolution that connect the otherwise distinct main rooms. They operate under the principles of the vertical and the diagonal, and rely on the translucent qualities of the façade fabric that allows light in while negating the view out.

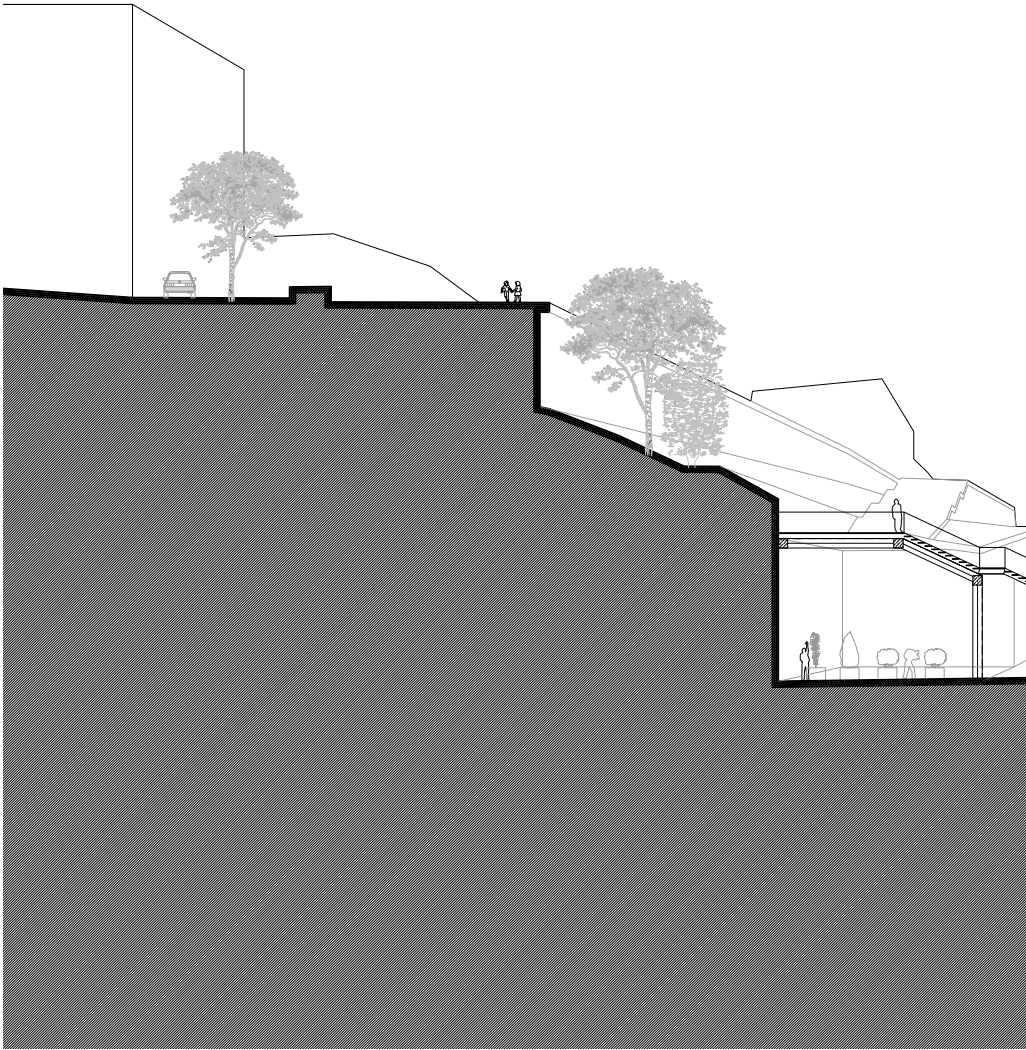


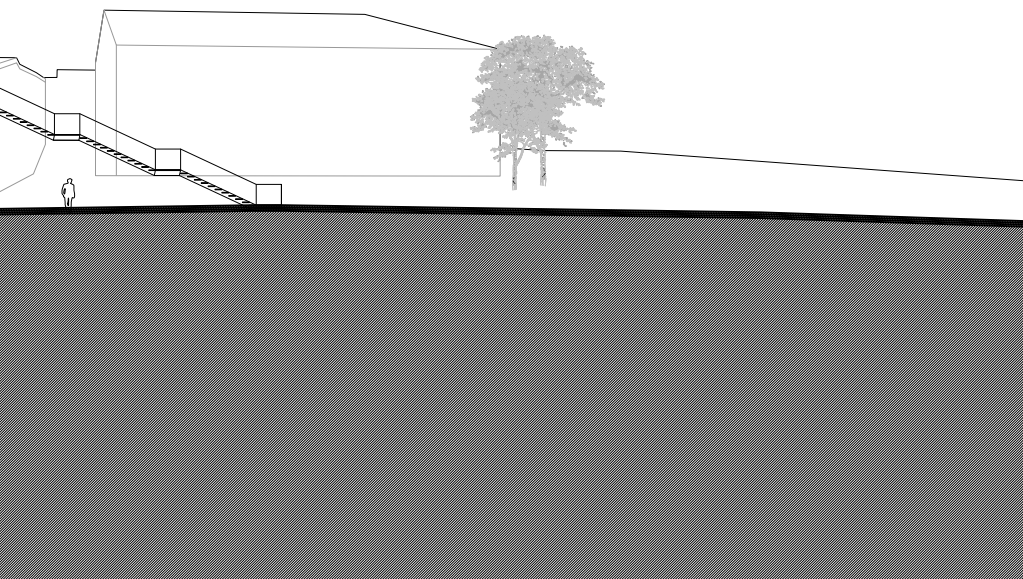




## 7 Lower Entrance

Although the building has multiple points of entry, the following progression starts from the bottom entrance. This one occurs through a slippage allowed for by the inclined shed, an existing structure that is repurposed as a greenhouse. The historic wall is used as the main structural element of the space, bringing into close proximity the relation of the visitor to the wall. Its weight contrast with the light structure built over the existing one. This one borrows from the linear detailing expressed in the inclined plaza. In this instance, the vertical slats wrap around the existing shed creating a pocket of entry, which occurs at the diagonal. The shed is wrapped in the same textile fabric that the sail above: it allows light in but softens the view out. Most importantly, this space is a buffer between the harsh exterior and soft interior, dimming the light and adjusting the conditions before entering the wall.



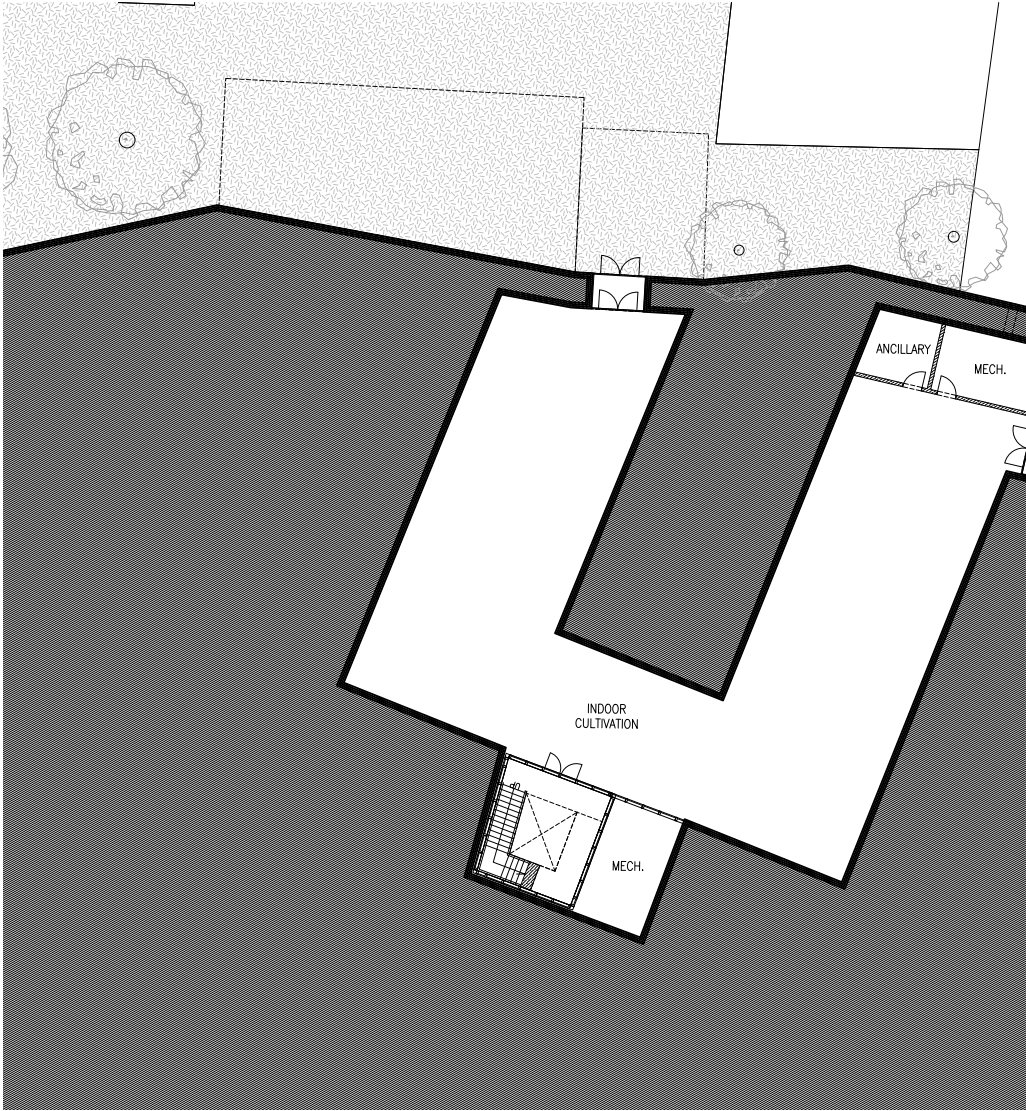


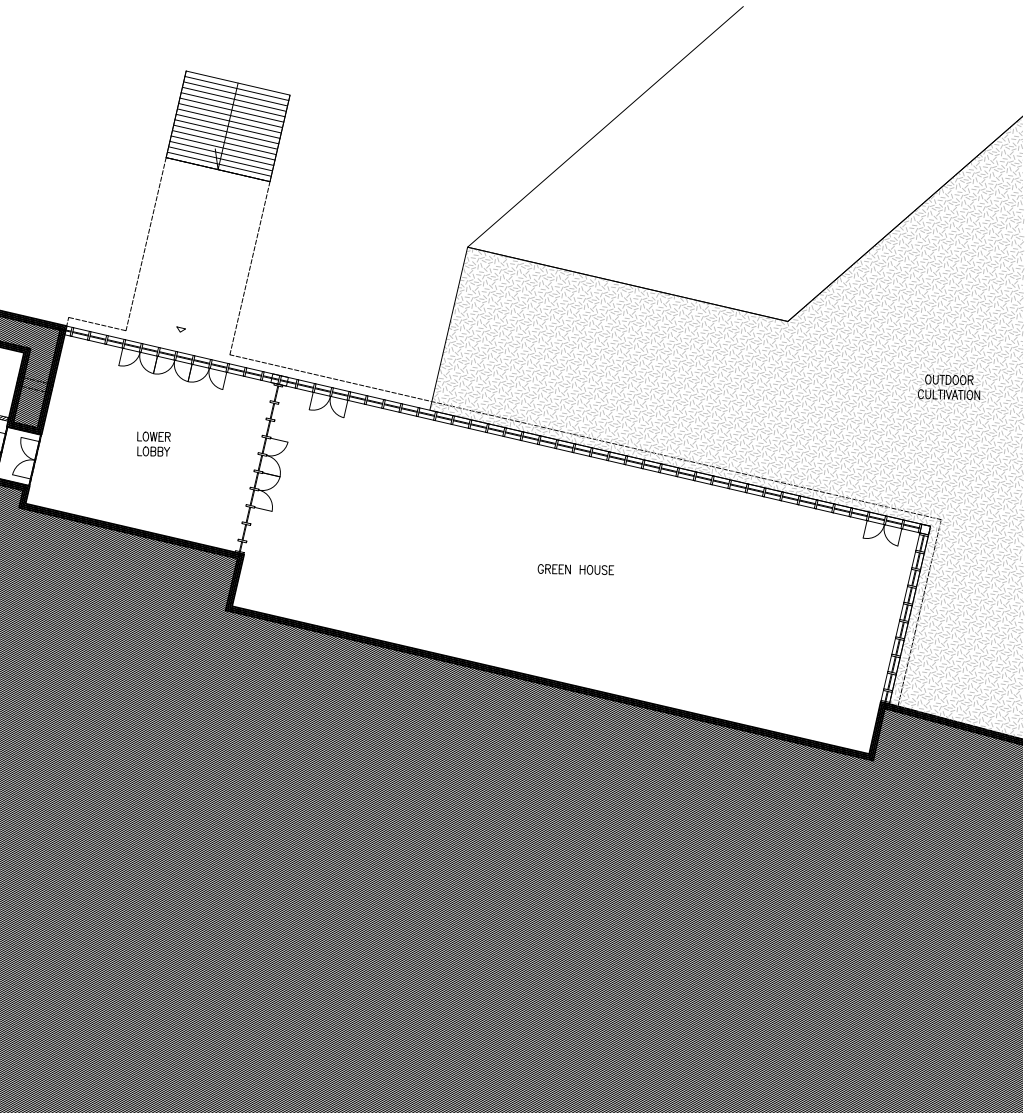


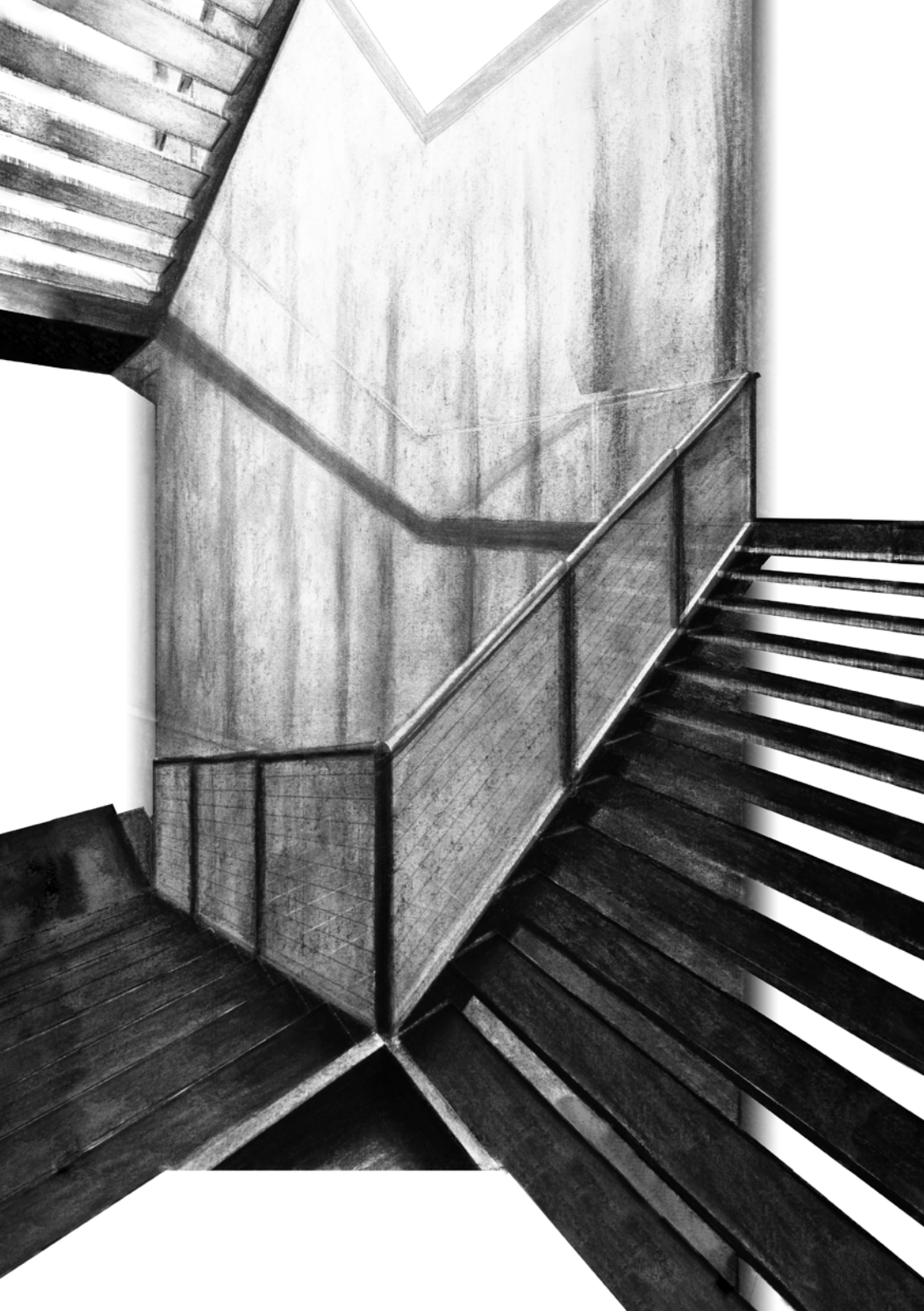
## 8 Lagumi

Coming through the wall and entering the hill reveals the lagumi. This existing space is literally carved into the limestone. The space, now abandoned, was used as storage during the 19th century when the main commercial port of the city was at the Sava River. Its conditions make ideal for indoor cultivation of mycelium, extending the program that occurs outside into the interior.

The space is dark, and moist, and the roughly exposed stone walls are bearing on you. This is contrasted by the newly poured smoothed floor. There are no windows or view to the outside that would interfere with the otherwise internalized landscape. The atmosphere of the space makes it clear that you are inside of the mountain and that it is pushing down on you. The overpowered and static nature of the is reinforced by its symmetry in plan. The point of exit to the sunken stairs is located at the center of the U-shaped space.







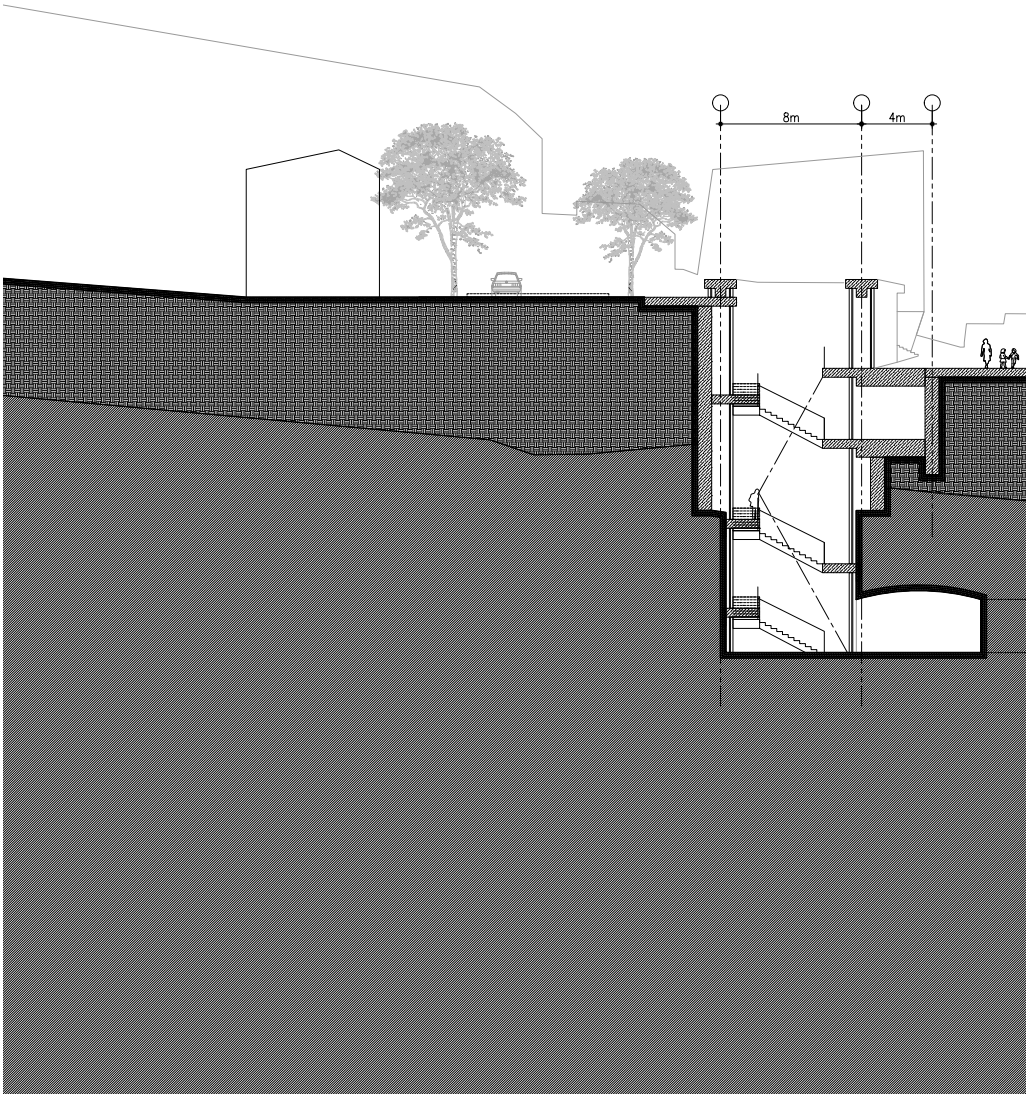


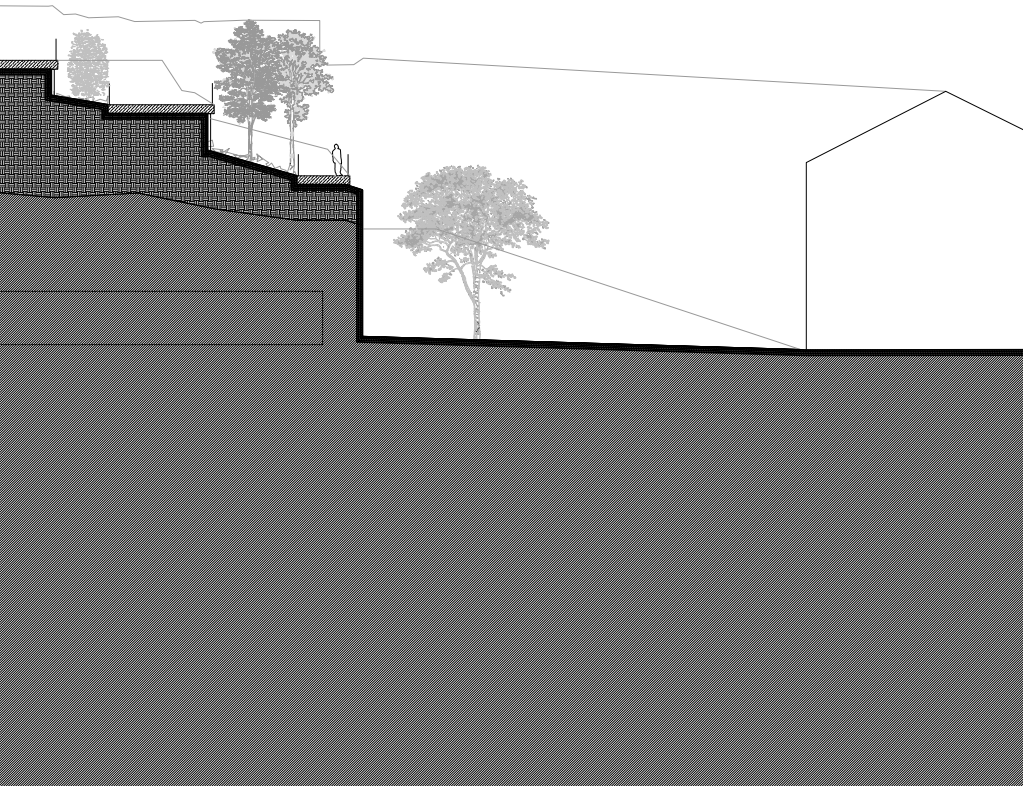
## 9 Sunken Stairs

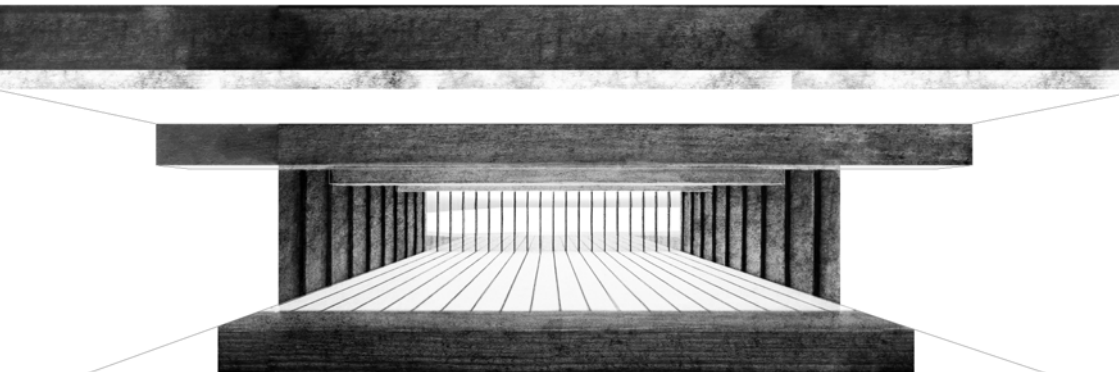
While the lagumi is a room, the sunken stairs that follow are a threshold. At the top of the stairs is a skylight which allows to pair vertical circulation to light ingress. Like in the inclined shed, the void shaft between the stairs is wrapped by the mesh fabric. This increases the experiential qualities of the movement of the visitor up the stairs.

The sunken stairs highlight the dislocation of space between the lagumi below and the theater above: its shape is not quite rectangular as to allow for the interface of the slightly offset grids of the rooms.

The section cut shows how the construction technique adapts to the terrain. This space is carved into the ground at its base and dug into the earth further up before piercing through the surface and opening to the sky. It is on the upper most floor where these stairs open up to the inclined plaza, allowing the threshold to knit into one continuous thread the lagumi, theater and outdoors.





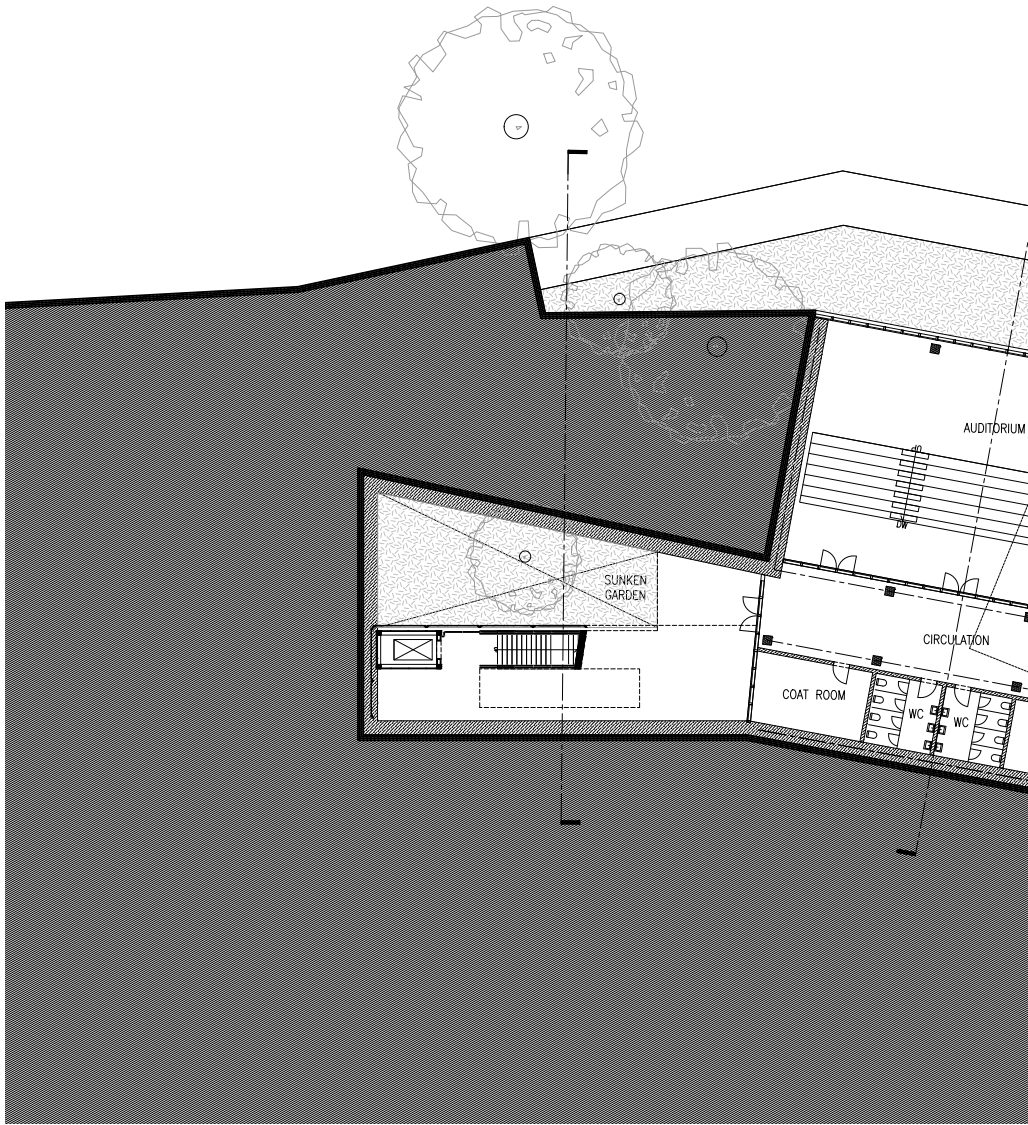


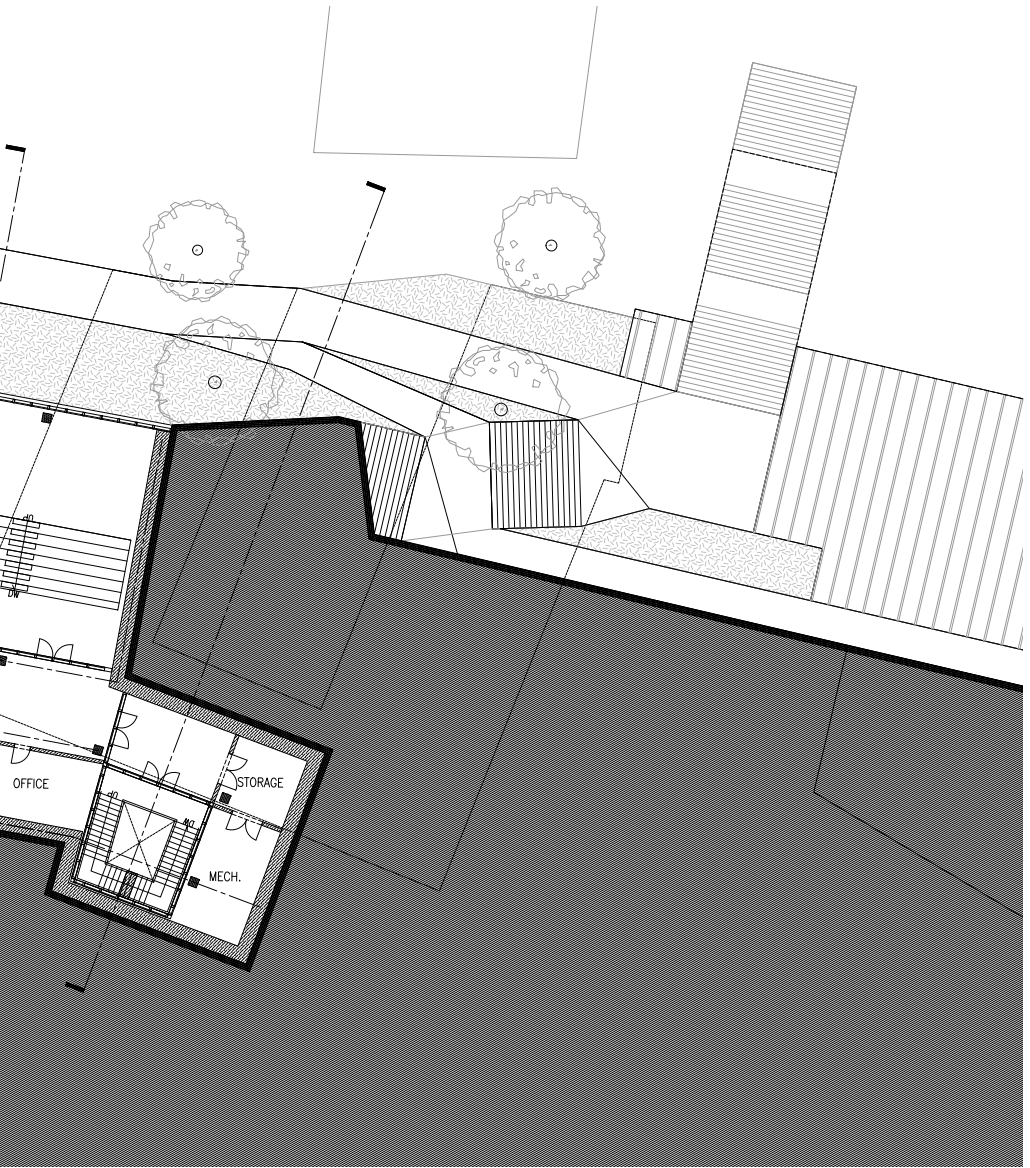
## 10 Theater

While the lagumi is existing and carved into the bedrock, the theater is newly dug into the ground. The large ceiling beams indicate the strength required to hold up the terrain. Similarly, the vertical mullions appear again on the inside.

However, while the room expresses its gravity defiance, it also offers the first and only unobstructed view to the exterior. It happens very precisely through a large window behind the stage. The symmetry of the room allows for contemplation into the landscape, looking from the inside of the hill out into the view of the river and beyond.

The symmetry is also of access: the space is accessible and top-lit through the sunken stairs on one side, and the catwalk stairs on the other. This latter threshold holds a small sunken garden, a place where the logics of the overground are generously making a brief appearance on the underground.







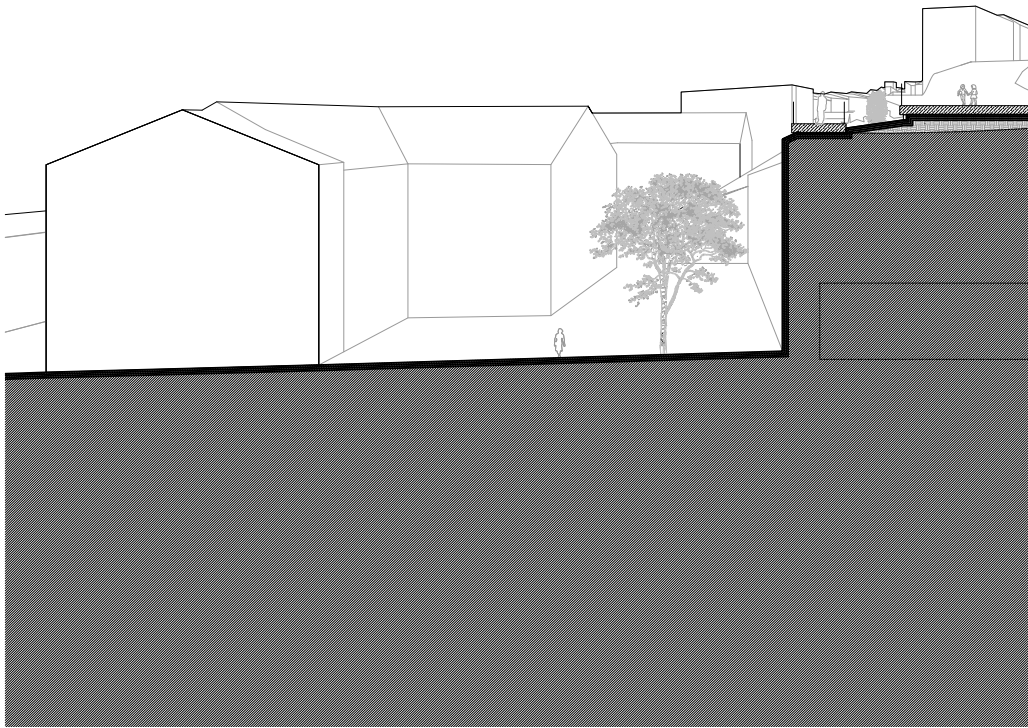


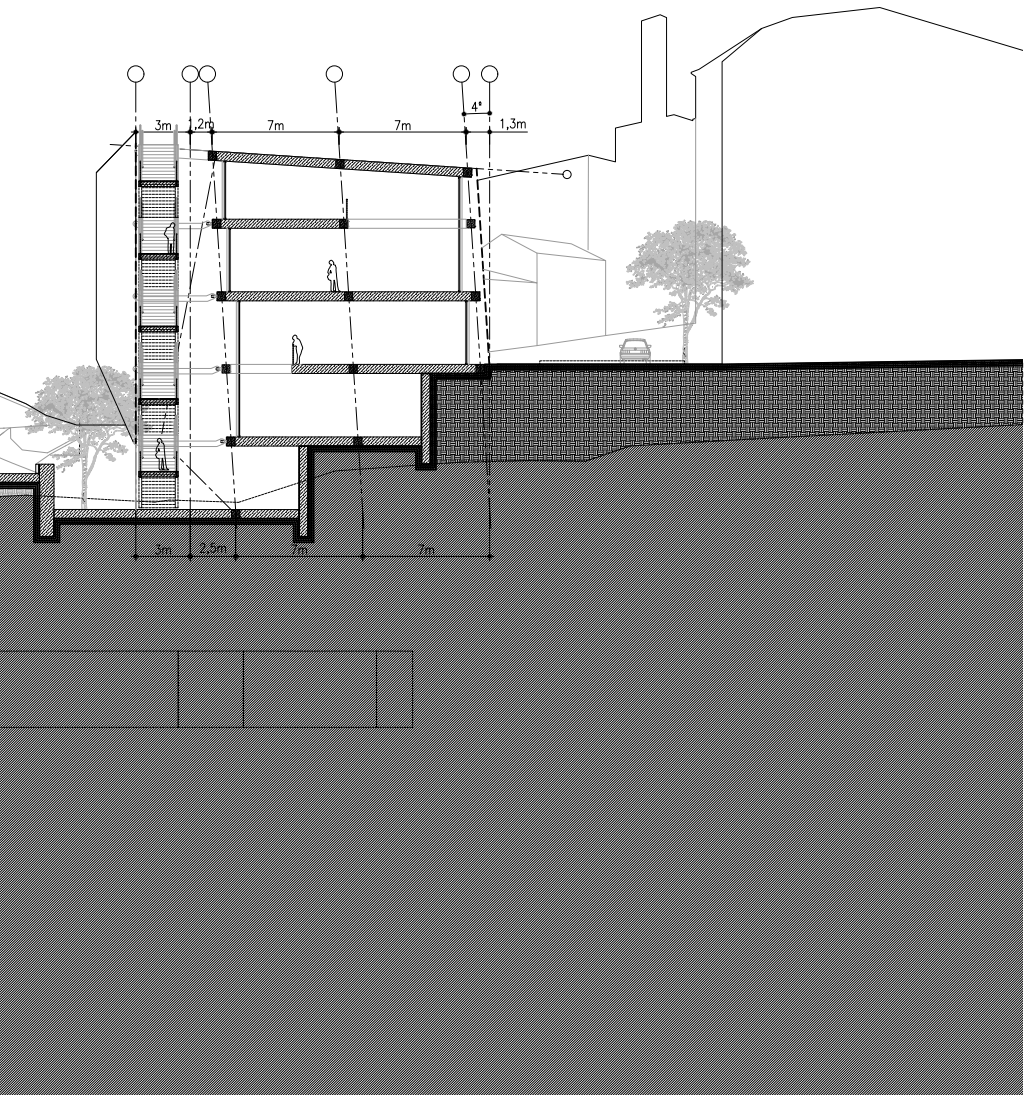
## 11 Catwalk Stairs

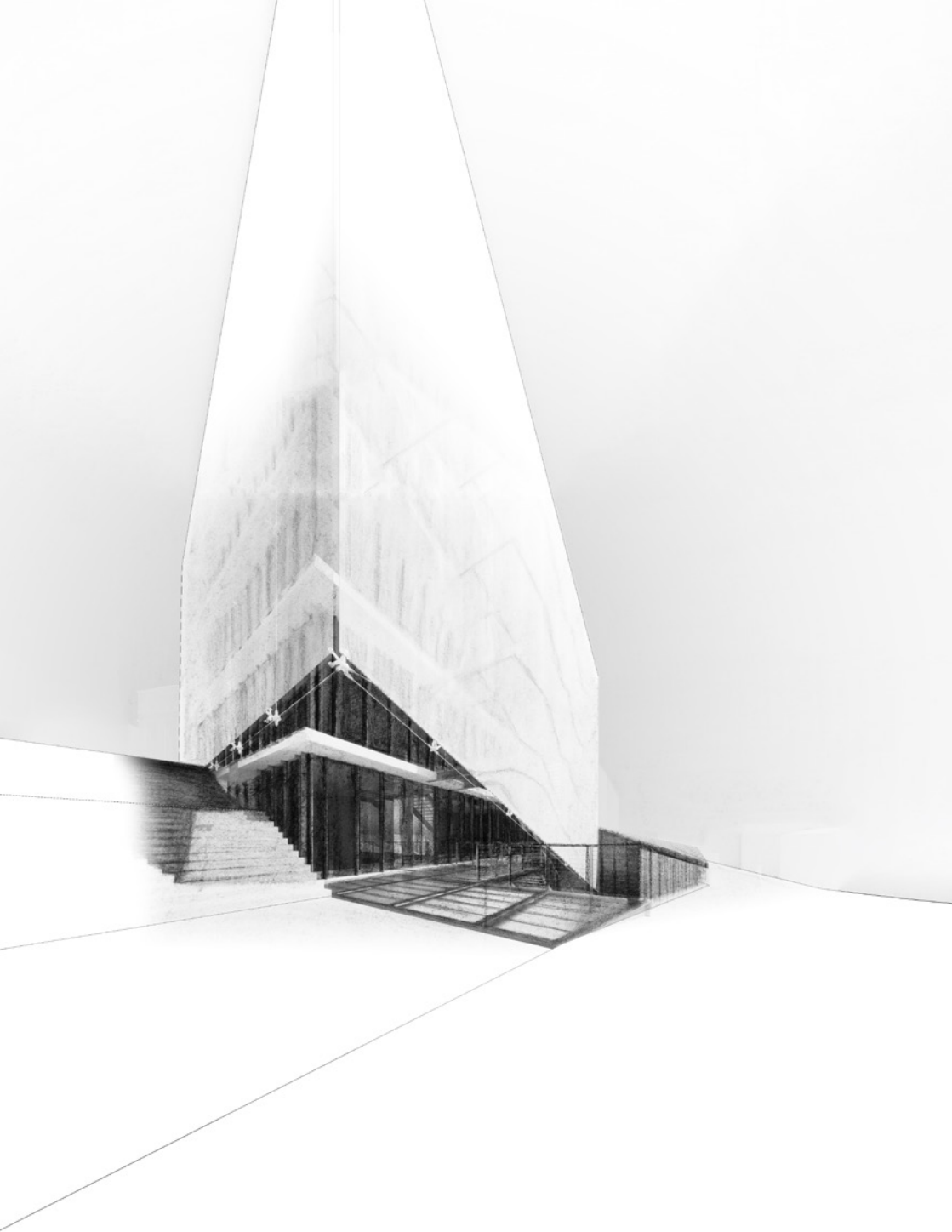
The transition ahead from the theater into the sail occurs through the catwalk stairs. Like the threshold of both the lower entrance and the sunken stairs, this one is also occurring by the mismatch of the grid of the theater with that of the sail. The irresolvable intersection of the two is creating a break in continuity that precisely becomes the connection in circulation.

Moreover, this mismatch in gridlines is translating vertically: a close look at the section shows how the gap between the stairs and the building narrows down as it goes up, creating a sense of compression as you ascend. This is because the sail is borrowing the formal language inherited from the dislocation of the lagumi and the theater: in plan the sail is stepping with the terrain, and in section it is twisting into the view.

Like the previous thresholds, this this one is also wrapped by the fabric, again creating a thin membrane that allows light in but negates the view out. The embedded frustration is forcing the viewer to keep on climbing in order to resolve it. Incidentally, the vertical movement is paired to the tensile structure of the catwalk. Additionally, the structural expression of the catwalk contrasts with that of floors of the sail. There is an inherent tension in language: one moving vertically and the other horizontally, one against the fabric the other against the vertical louvers.



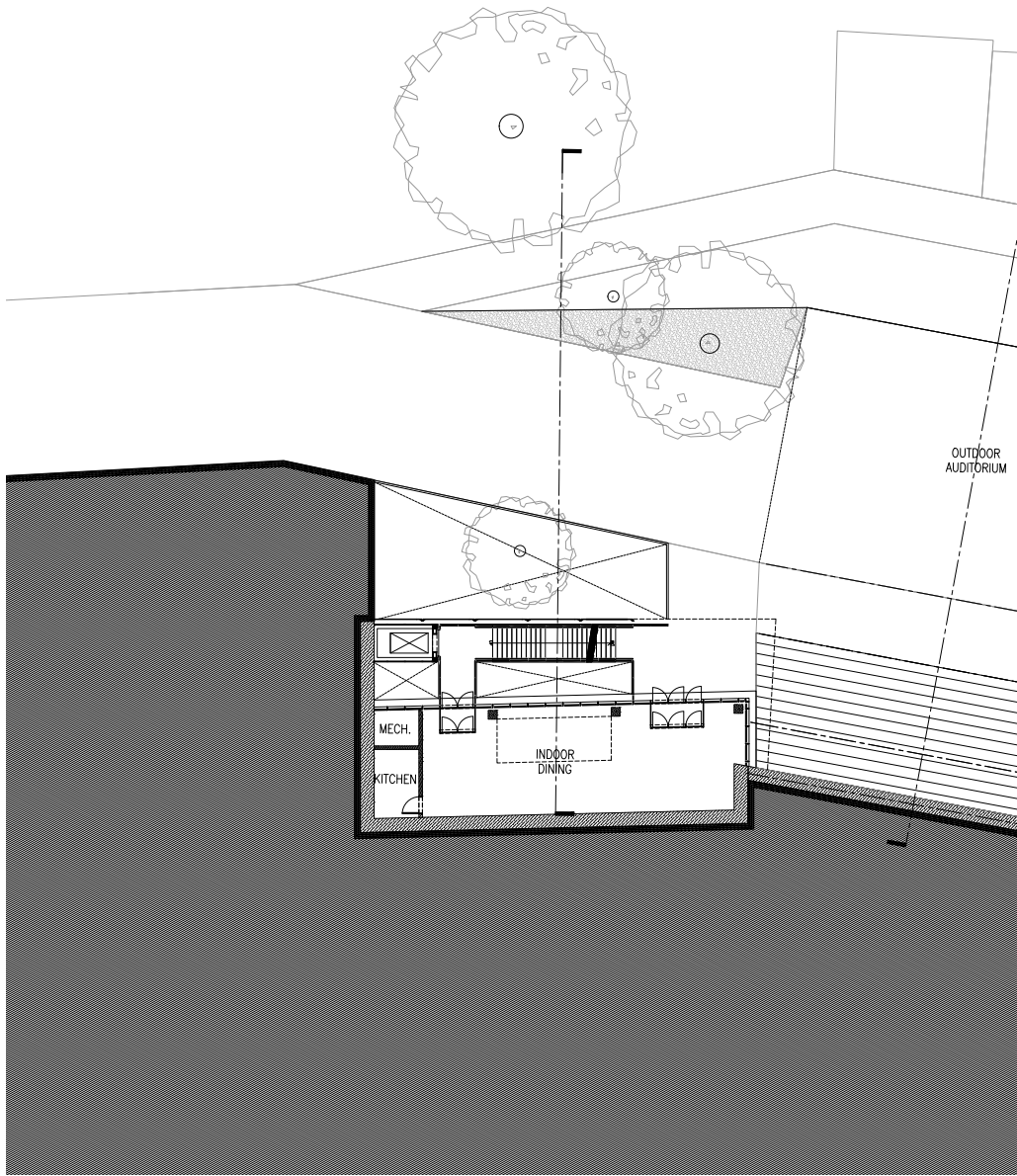




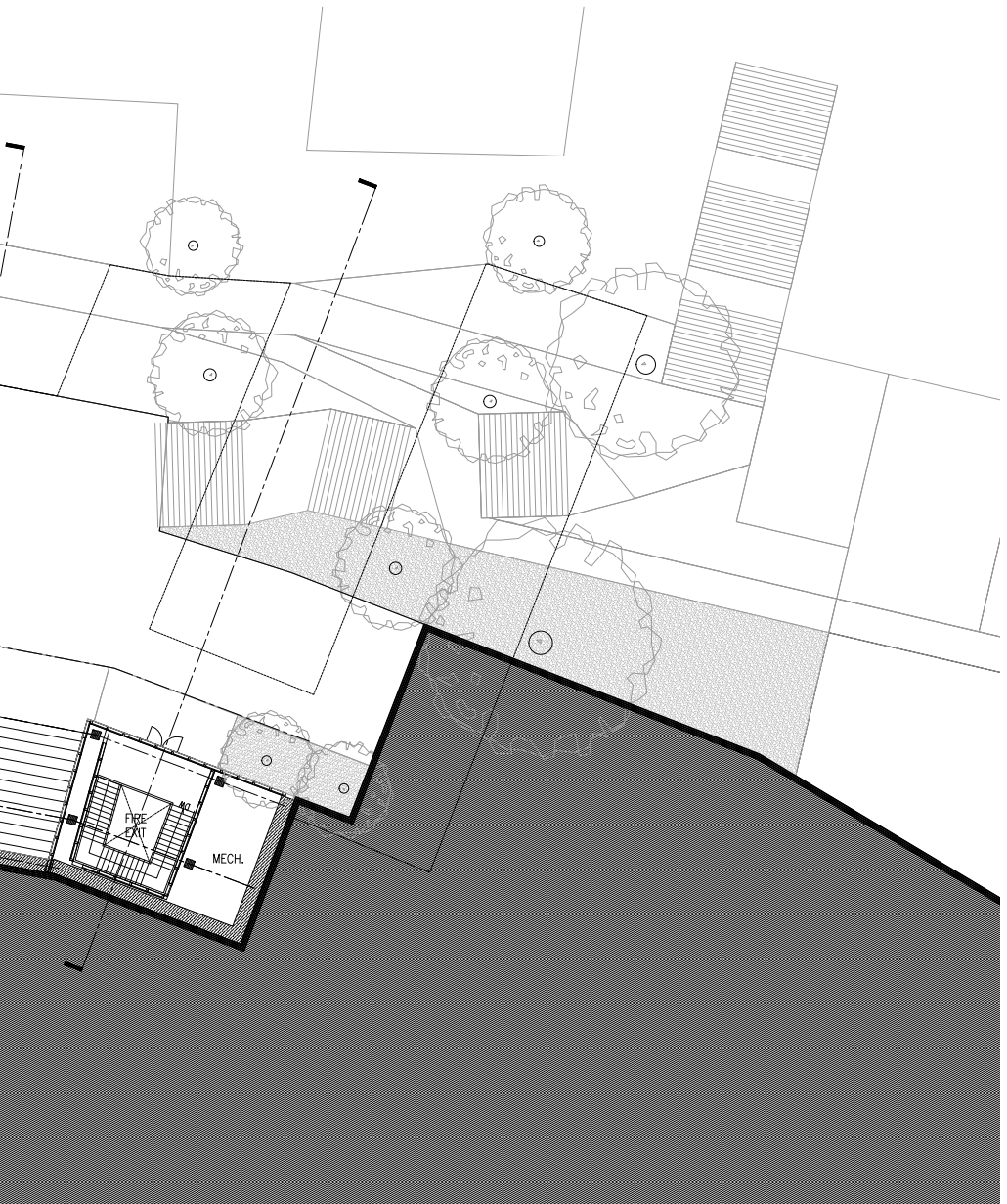
## 12 Middle Entrance

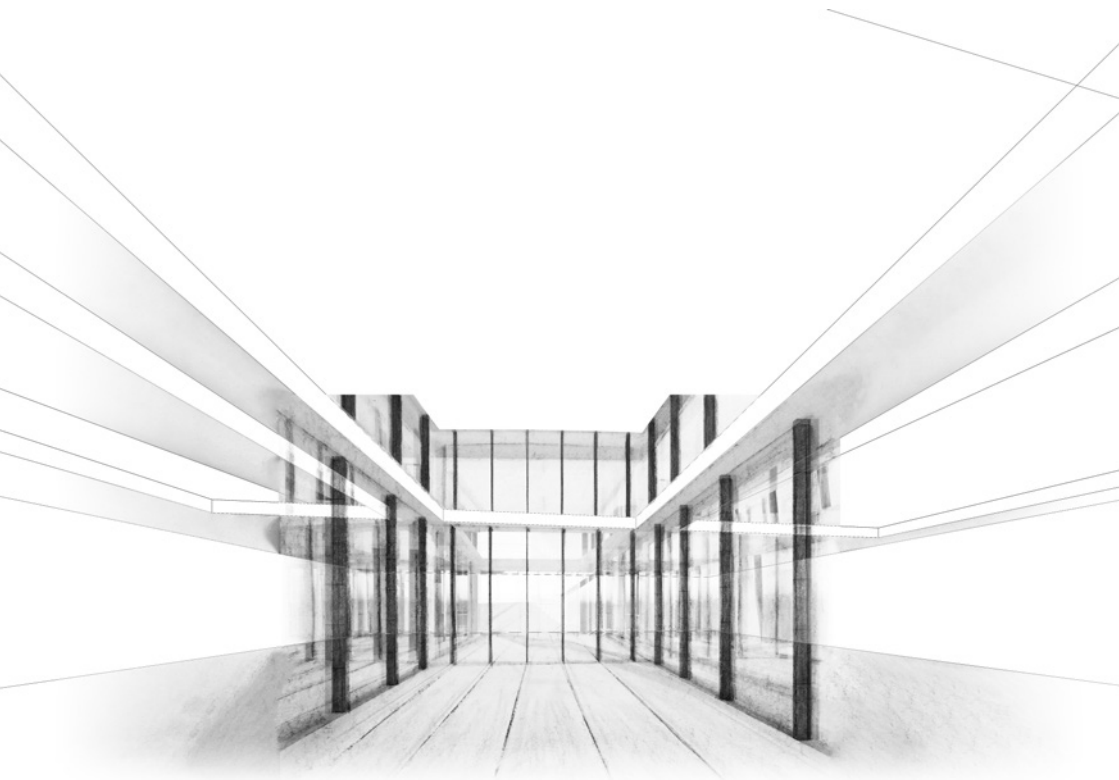
The floor plan of minus one shows the outdoor amphitheater flanked to each side by the two vertical connectors. That is because, like the sunken stairs, the catwalk stairs also give direct access to the inclined plaza. This occurs in an unusually dramatic point of the building where the procession through the building allows for a brief glimpse into the outside world. Like a figure eight, it at the middle entrance where the logics of the underground conflate with those of the overground in a dramatic diagonal.

The diagonal also prominent in the elevation: the fabric covering the sail all the way down from the sunken garden is lifted at this point to allow the entrance into the sail. In fact, the fabric is keeping at this point the datum of the street above. When seen in reverse, it means that the leading edge of the fabric runs continuously from the street above into the theater below through the middle entrance and sunken garden. In doing so, the fabric is faintly covering the sail, with its logics borrowed from the inclined plaza: the predominant horizontal slab with its expressive vertical mullions.





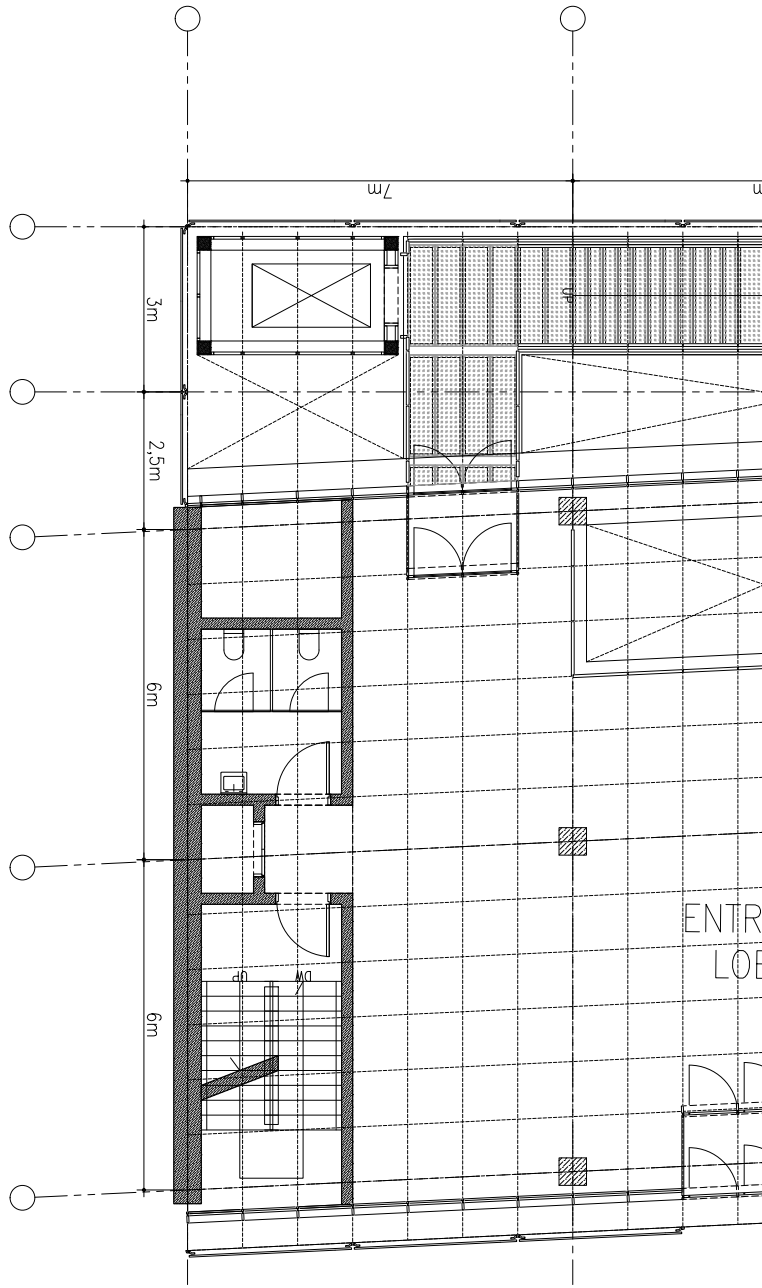


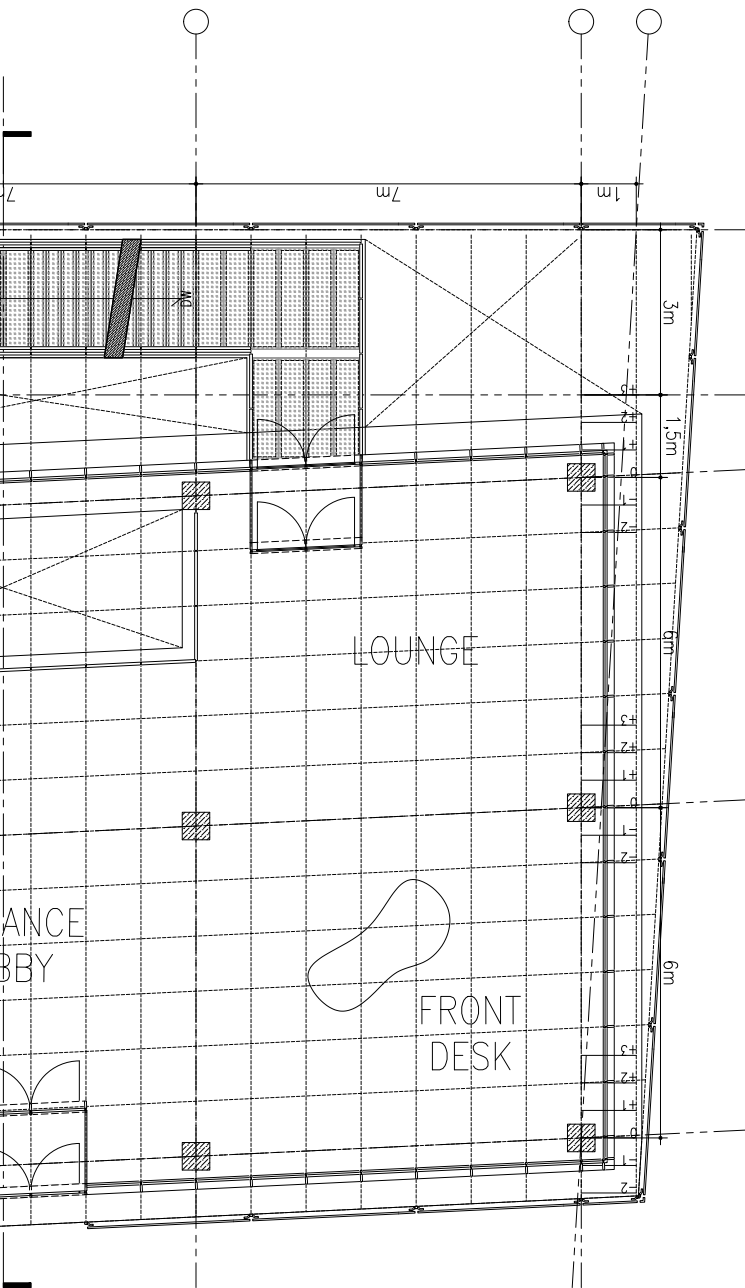


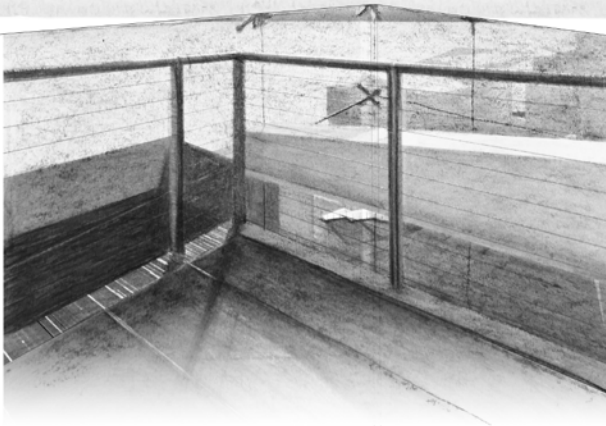
## 13 Sail

Finally, you enter into the interior of the sail. Like the previous rooms, this one is highly symmetrical, with the point of access located on opposite sides of the same axis. However, unlike the lagumi and the theater, the structure of the sail tries to dematerialize. This is achieved by opening up the walls to the exterior and allowing the maximum amount of light inside. The careful detailing of the floor to ceiling windows in relation to the mullions is critical to achieve this effect.

The sight however is contrived: the reflection of the glass as well as the outside wrapping are creating a mediated connection with the exterior. Therefore, even though the sail is fully over ground, it does not offer the unobstructed view that the theater did a floor below. The effect of the frustrated view is reinforced by other intentional contradictions. For example, even though the floor plan is symmetrical, the room is not. That is because each floor is rotating in relation to each other. The floor does not match the ceiling, and the columns are slanted. The mismatch is made more evident by the internal balconies. Finally, although the space is dematerializing it remains heavily anchored: its whole south wall is blind since it faces the neighbor. Its function as a shear wall is a reminder that the building, to express its lightness, is embedded to the neighboring building. In all, the obstructed view and internal carvings are created an inner landscape. Although the space portrays itself as dematerialized, it is in fact behaving like the lagumi in internalizing the view, albeit through light instead of darkness.







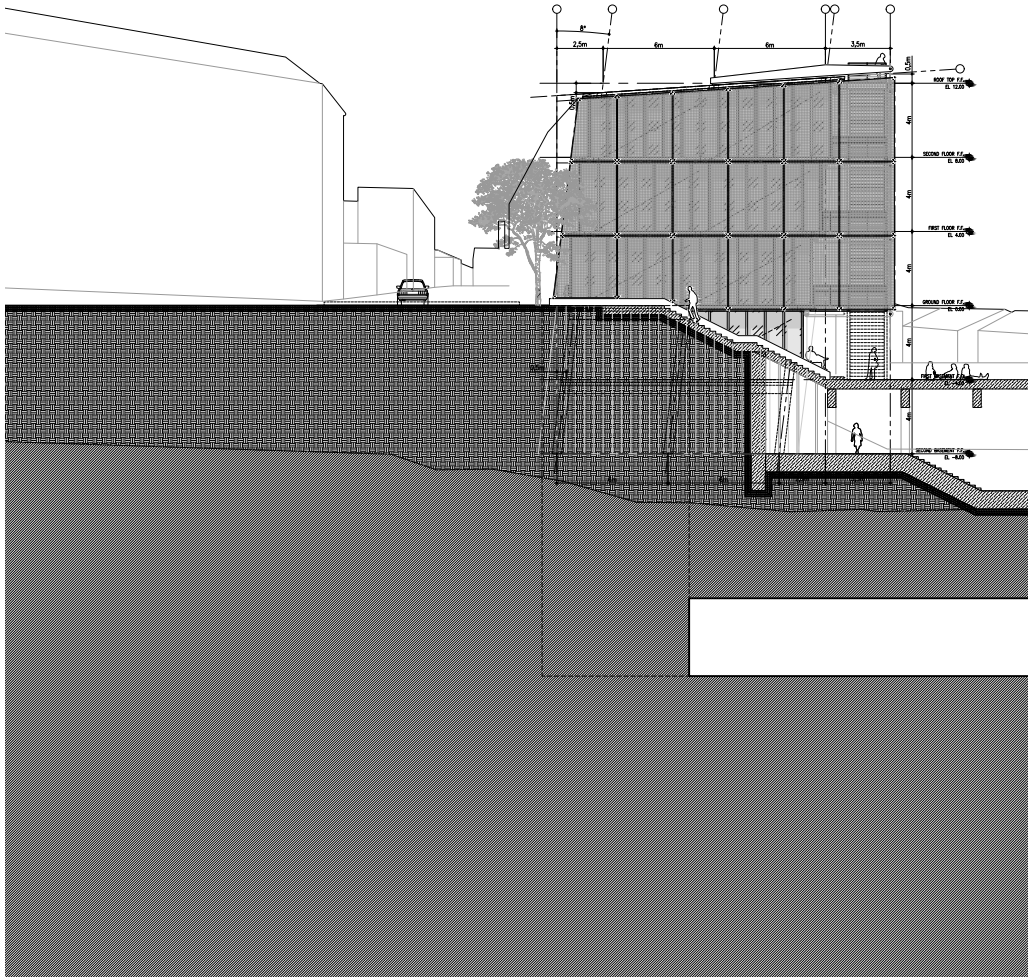


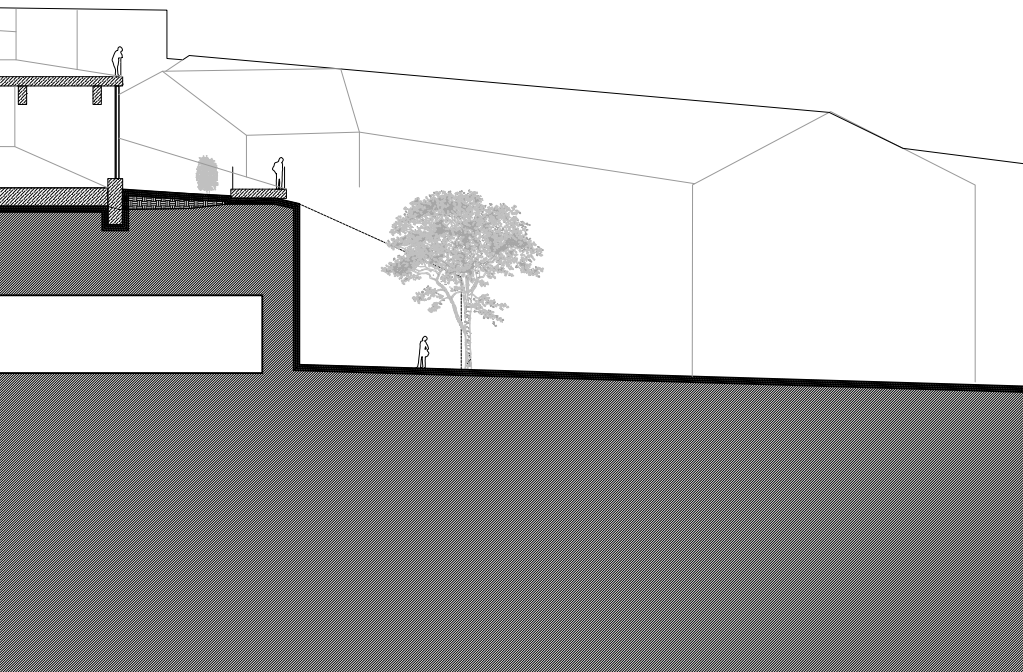
## 14 Belvedere

The progression culminates in the belvedere. It is at this point that the fabric finally disappears, allowing for the unobstructed view to appear. From here the views are stunning: from New Belgrade to the cathedral bellow, from the fortress all the way down the Sava River.

However, the promise is not fully delivered. In fact, the view remains mediated, never fully delivered, and never palpable. The handrail, the protruding structure, and the slightly peaking fabric are permanent layers that limit the full perception of the view.

Here the catwalk goes from hanging – and pulling you up - into resting onto the protruding auxiliary structure. Like a submarine that has touched surface, there is no further vertical movement to attain. Therefore, the seemingly endless vertical progression comes to an abrupt end. The initial to go from the depths of the earthly lagumi to the dematerialized sail is far from fulfilled; in fact, it was an unreachable goal from the very beginning.







## Epilogue

The culmination of the promenade is borrowed from that of the Tower of Babel: the aspiration for the light and ephemeral is futile. However, the journey is not. Instead of aspiring for that which is unreachable, the project is proposing the in-between as the place to engage in.

In this project the space in-between the mundane and the transcendent has become spatialized, and made explicit precisely at the middle, at the confluence of the under and over ground, the old and the new, the vertical and the horizontal, the public and the private. That is because architecture is inherently a negotiation that occurs in an act of mediation. Architecture engages with the extremities of the spectrum of the transcendental and the mundane, dealing with the myriad forces that exist in the in-between. So even though in some ways the lagumi speaks to the mundane and the sail to the transcendental, truth is that neither of them are that. The whole project delves in the in-between, just making it particularly evident and expressive at the geographic center of the project.

If in the parable of the Tower of Babel God disperses the people by creating different languages, I'd like to voice that of architecture itself, and how it speaks through detailing and construction. Earlier today I offered a series of opposing terms that showcased the tension between the transcendental and the mundane. Now, having revealed the power of the in-between, I'd like to offer a complementary list of operations: revealing, unearthing, carving, and layering; breaking, hinging, and dislocating;

modulation, interface, and the diagonal. It is through these terms and operations that my building is operating, and it is through these terms that I believe architecture can have an impact in the world.

So, to summarize: by engaging in the in-between, architecture evidences and makes explicit the divide between the transcendental and the mundane, not by reconciling the two but by bringing them into the same operating plane. In all, architecture is neither a form of escape nor of survival. Architecture is a form of dwelling in the in-between.

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